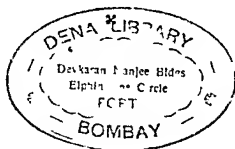


An Introduction to the Study of
MEDIAEVAL INDIAN SCULPTURE

by

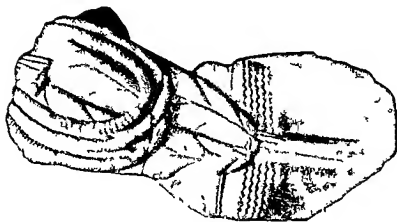
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EDWARD GOLDSTON
25 MUSEUM STREET, LONDON, W.C. 1

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Frontopiece

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF
MEDIAEVAL INDIAN SCULPTURE.

SOME sort of system of classification by periods is useful, and in fact necessary, when discussing the development of any special art, although it should be confessed that any such system put forward is nothing more than an analysis of extant knowledge, and where that is wanting, of personal opinion. It is therefore desirable that the nomenclature used should not imply more than the facts warrant. Furthermore, since classification is primarily a matter of facts and not of their interpretation, it is obviously better to stress distinctions rather than risk their confusion as the result of over-simplification. Ruskin's "large chronology" of Greek sculpture is open to criticism on both these points for he passes from the "archaic" work of the 9th, 8th and 7th centuries, to the "best" work of the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries, to the "corrupt" work of the 3rd, 2nd and 1st centuries, the two latter terms introducing criteria that are rather moral than æsthetic, while at the same time the several periods so brought forward as units obviously contain differences that are submerged by the implied simplicity of the exposition.

It need not be pointed out that to apply the fashionable psychological terminology of to-day to an art so little studied as the art of Indian sculpture, would be to court obscurity. Such terms as "Primitive," "Classical" and "Decadent" are relative and more or less meaningless without the complete formulation of the ideas of which they are an abstract. They belong to the vocabulary of historiography rather than of history, and cannot be altogether purged of evolutionary suggestions. Similarly such terms as Stylised and Romantic, Popular and Hieratic are too indefinite to provide a framework for anything but an æsthetic discourse in general, an interlude in Taste.

It is taken for granted that the object of any classification is to distinguish real differences comprehensibly, while at the same time

defining the historical and geographical range of the objects united in any one class. With regard to Indian sculpture, geographical distinctions can seldom be drawn. There are no "schools" of Indian sculpture in any real sense. It is true that a few local types of work can be distinguished, such as the late mediaeval work of Orissa, but the difference between Orissan work of the 10th and 11th centuries and northern Indian work of the same period as a whole, is very slight compared with the general likeness. It must, however, be acknowledged that there is a radical difference between the post 6th century work of northern and southern India, but it is the result of parallel processes both having their origin in the rock cut sculpture of the great cave temples of the Deccan.

Ajanta (circa 500 A.D.), Aurangabad (early 6th century A.D.), Badami (circa 570 A.D.) and Ellora (early 6th to 8th centuries A.D.) were brought into being at a time when the art of structural building in stone was in its infancy in India, and because that art was in its infancy Indian architecture and Indian sculpture are essentially one and indivisible. It is from the wooden architecture of the imperial palaces of the Gupta and Vakataka kings of the 5th century that the architecture of northern and southern India derived its forms, henceforth developing individually. This wooden architecture has vanished utterly except from the walls of Ajanta where the frescoes still preserve something of its grandeur, its walled gardens and curtained pavilions. The earliest existing examples of Indian stone architecture are certain, small flat roofed shrines built in the 5th century. These are reproduced cut in the living rock at Udayagiri (Gwalior State) and at Ajanta, where the organisation of the several monastic communities of that centre seems to have demanded the introduction of a private shrine in each *Vihara* or living cave. This was cut in the centre of the back wall and faithfully reproduces the four-pillared verandah, capitals and complicated door mouldings of the little 5th century structural buildings. In time at Aurangabad and Ellora modifications were introduced, which may be traced on the one hand to the special necessities of a rock cutting technique and on the other to the necessities of the communities and cults whose existence called Indian sculpture and architecture, as it remains to us, into being. Thus at Badami three Brahmanical caves exist and since the monks' cells of the old *Viharas* were unnecessary, they

were omitted. The little verandah of the older shrines was also omitted in order to give direct access to the shrine from the body of the hall. At Aurangabad which is only slightly later than Ajanta a second modification in plan is evident, which is further developed at Ellora. The rite of circumambulation made it necessary to cut a passage round the shrine. Eventually in the *Dhumar Lena* (cave 29) at Ellora and at Elephanta, the shrine is isolated in the centre of a great pillared hall, the *Linga* being thus made visible from all parts of the temple.

This latter development was not practicable in structural buildings. No attempt was made to reproduce structurally the spaciousness of plan of the later cave-temples. However, the Chalukyan structural temples at Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal show a line of development parallel to that of the rock-cut shrines and closely linked with it. Their tiered spires preserve the old wooden forms in miniature as outward decoration, but structurally they are purely lithic, spaces being spanned either by courses of large blocks corbelled in or of still larger blocks set across the corners of the square to form a stepped dome. It is especially to be noticed that these temples which are of considerable size (the *Virupaksha* Temple at Pattadakal is approximately 100 ft. long and over 40 ft. wide, the roof of the *Mandapa* being carried on four longitudinal rows of pillars) were built, as it were en bloc, even the pillars being left in the rough, the sculpture and final architectural form being hewn from the mass in one process.

This method is a natural development of the rock-cutting technique, the details of which are preserved in the many unfinished caves at Ajanta and Ellora. Unlike the Egyptian tombs the Indian caves were not quarried out: that is to say, the stone was not cut in blocks and put to constructional purposes. It was chipped away with the narrow Indian chisel and the mallet, and carried away in baskets by coolies to form dumps as conveniently near as possible. At Ellora these dumps are very conspicuous and in certain places the actual approach to the cave is constructed out of the chippings. They contain pottery fragments of various forms, many of them smoke-blackened, and also goat and sheep bones in large quantities and fragments of glass bangles and curry stones, the accumulated rubbish of a considerable period . . .

The site to be excavated having been selected with almost infallible accuracy of geological understanding, the face of the rock was cut back to the level, perhaps seven or eight feet in. Here the plinth of the verandah and the verandah pillars were set off and hewn. The body of the cave was then excavated through its doors and windows, working from the top downwards and sideways, setting off the pillars in their proper places as the work proceeded. There are certain indications in the unfinished caves that this work was done by more or less unskilled piece work, but on the other hand the unfinished pillars, even when they have been left entirely in the rough, show the correct tapering and are too finely cut to allow of any appreciable margin of error on the part of the workmen responsible for the rough hewing. The sculpture, it appears, was outlined with the chisel on the surface to be cut before any part was begun. The head and face were usually finished first and are found so, even where the rest of the body remains only roughly blocked out.

At Ellora the *Kailasa*, a rock cut temple which is almost a duplicate of the great Pattadakal temples, stands out as the latest of a series of caves (Nos. I-XVI) which embody the salient features of the history of Indian sculpture and architecture from the end of the 5th century to the middle of the 8th century. It was built by Krishnaraja, a king of the Rashtrakuta dynasty, who during this period had secured the overthrow of the Chalukyas of Badami and Pattadakal. These kings in their turn had been hereditary foes of the Pallava kings of the extreme south, in whose reigns were cut many caves and the well known miniature rock cut shrines of Mamallapuram. The style which all these temples exemplify, in its subsequent development is known as southern Indian or *Dravidian*, a less preferable term suggesting, as it does, a development based upon ethnic differences. This southern development both sculpturally and architecturally is distinct from subsequent development in northern India. Certain of the sculptures at the Ellora *Kailasa* are literally almost identical, not only in iconography, a thing manifestly of the period, but in manner and touch, with work at Pattadakal. It is interesting to note that this style differs from the style of the sculptures in the *Das Avatara* cave (No. XV) which is next to the *Kailasa* and cannot have been cut more than a few decades before it. In fact, the *Das Avatara* type of sculpture is actually represented in the *Kailasa*.

court-yard. It may therefore be taken for granted that the *Kailasa* was created by craftsmen from the south, transported at the will of the conqueror of the Chalukyas, who in their time had been conquerors of the Pallavas and are known to have enlisted craftsmen from the south to build their temples at Pattadakal. With the passing of the Rashtrakutas contact through such distances evidently was no longer possible. The Yadavas succeeded to the Ellora country but their faces seem to have been set towards the north, perhaps prophetically, for they were to meet their end at Muhammadan hands. Even in the south there does not seem to have been any real social homogeneity. The Pallavas were followed by the Cholas, the builders of the great Tanjore temple, prototype of the hundred and one temples of the Madras Presidency of to-day. The southern Deccan saw, moreover, the development of a parallel, but independent and quite unique, architecture which culminated in the Hoysala shrines at Belur and Halebid.

It has been pointed out that no attempt was made to imitate structurally the spaciousness of plan of the late cave-temples or to overcome in any way the severe limitations of the building technique. As has been said, the domed shrine of the southern temples is derived from ancient wooden forms, such as are to be seen on the Bharhut and Sanchi bas-reliefs. The Corbel method of dome construction forbade width of span, but lent itself to height, the spire rising step by step, miniature story crowned by miniature story, each complete with its miniature dome. In Hoysala architecture the traditions of the many pillared, flat-roofed cave-temples was preserved in the creation of pillared *mandapas* or pavilions, and indeed it persisted until the 17th century when the great Madura temple was built. The gateway that led into the temple court, already in existence at Pattadakal and Ellora, was also greatly developed, in course of time towering over the shrine itself. It may be said that its *mandapas* and *gopuras* are the really distinctive features of southern Indian architecture, the temple with its many courts and its host of Brahmins, attendants, offering-sellers and devotees, coming to be a walled city in itself.

In general the development of the northern and southern styles is identical. Both end in the creation of towering spires, which are achieved by means of the same original constructional

certain shrines have the northern curvilinear spire fully developed, but on a small scale. At Bhuvanesvar, too, there are certain temples very similar, not only with regard to the state of development of the spire, but with regard to the construction of the porch and the details of pierced stone windows, door-mouldings and iconography. The Aihole and Pattadakal temples cannot be later than the middle of the eighth century. The *Parasuramesvara* and *Muktesvara* temples at Bhuvanesvar are probably early ninth century. The earliest stone temple with a curvilinear spire is perhaps the *Hucchimaligudi* temple at Aihole. This temple has sloping aisle-roofs like the *Virupaksha* temple at Pattadakal, while the little *Malegitti* temple at Badami has a flat roof throughout and stepped spire. The bracket forms and sculpture of the latter temple are also earlier. By comparison with the dated Badami Cave III, which looks out upon it across the town in the gap below, it may be dated early seventh century. It seems probable, therefore, that the curvilinear spire came into being before the seventh century and it is certain that at two places at least, both at Aihole and Pattadakal, architects built it side by side with the stepped southern spire, which may be called more primitive, only because at a glance it is visibly derived from the ancient wooden architecture, an obvious derivation it never loses even in the seventeenth century.

It must be noticed that all these groups of temples are built of good free stone, quarried and laid in blocks of megalithic size. However, good free stone is not universally distributed in India. In the Ganges valley, in the Central Provinces and in Sind it is not easily procured. The ancient sites of India as laid bare by excavation consist usually of intricate foundations of unbaked, sun-dried brick covered with the soft rubble into which such brickwork speedily degenerates. The foundations are intricate because large spaces could not easily be spanned with such a supporting material. Terra-cotta panels applied decoratively as string-courses seem to have been used at Kushan Mathura and terra-cotta figurines of all periods are common. But burnt brick is conspicuous for its absence in the early periods. The platforms upon which the Asoka pillars stand are of sun-dried bricks, as were the Bharhut and Sanchi stupas. Burnt brick first appears in the great temple at Bodhi Gaya, in the stupas of Sind and in the great temples at Bhutargaon and Sirpur in the Central

Provinces, which date from the middle of the 5th century to the middle of the 6th. There is no breach in the tradition, the same motives and mouldings are used, and the objective was the same, the creation of a Buddhist stupa, or of a temple the design of which should suggest piled-up stories reaching to the skies. At Bodh Gaya the outline of the spire is rectilinear, in fact it stands mid way between the two styles. At Sirpur the outline has become curvilinear. It is not easy at a distance to distinguish brick-built temples of the 9th and 10th centuries from stone, for the northern curvilinear style departs from the megalithic stone-work of the 5th century shrines, and in fact owes its origin to that departure. The form of the spire is the natural outcome of corbelling methods working with bricks or trimmed ashlar of limited size. From the nature of the material again, is derived the circular capstone (*Amalaka*) which crowns the spire, binding the whole together by its great weight. It is worthy of notice that in certain cases the old direct chiselling methods were preserved. The decoration of these temples consists chiefly of finely moulded terra-cotta plaques applied to the structure superficially, but there are also evidences of mouldings being cut with the chisel from the finished brick surface. However, most of the figure sculpture of the late mediaeval stone temples is cut in the block and built in . . .

Such a survey establishes the propriety of the primary division of *Indian architecture and sculpture into northern and southern styles*. It is, perhaps, surprising that as a whole the work should be so lacking in local variety. India is usually, and rightly, referred to as a sub-continent, but it is above all a land of ancient lines of communications. The wide distribution of the so called "iron age" cairns alone proves that. Reference may also be made to the travellers from afar, merchants, mendicants, even ploughmen, whose names are preserved by the dedicatory inscriptions of the early cave-temples of western India. India has never been an easy land to travel in. Every cart and beast that crossed the Nana and Malsej Ghats leading from the Deccan to the sea port of Kalyan had to be unloaded and the loads transported by coolies from one side of the pass to the other. In the rainy season, half an hour's downpour is sufficient to render the fords of the ancient routes impassable for several hours. On the other hand, time is not important as a factor in Indian travel. It

is perhaps as well to point out that this complicated system of inter-communication was limited in a sense strictly Ratzellian by the geographical facts, the chief forces being hill ranges and forest areas. The early city-sites of southern India seem as a whole to lie along the sea-coast. They looked towards the sea, an open means of communication, but at their back was the forest, a different world through which the paths and cart-tracks of mendicant and merchant wound their way along the variable line of least difficult advance. This particular area has long since been disforested, but until recently extensive tracts of India, notably the central forest uplands, which proved impenetrable even to Muhammadan arms, were literally outside India, ethnically and culturally.

In discussing the history of India as a whole there is a tendency to exaggerate its isolation. Neither the Himalayas nor the hills of the Afghan frontier are impenetrable. In fact, so little is this so, that in many ways the Indus Valley and the Punjab must be regarded as lying only on the fringe of India proper. The lie of the two great river systems of the Ganges and Nerbada has determined the general direction of the spread of culture in India. On either side are hills and forests, marking the line of advance as definitely as any mountain defile. In modern India the same factors have brought about a concentration of population in the Nerbada valley, connecting two centres of greatest density, the Ganges valley and the Malabar coast. If the geographical extent of the dynasties of India is plotted the same track will be found to have been followed. The Mauryas and Sungas ruled in the Ganges valley (4th century B.C. to 1st century A.D.): the Kushans ruled in the upper Ganges valley (2nd century A.D.): the Kshatrapas and Satavahanas ruled in western India (to the 4th century): the Gupta-Vakataka alliance extended from the Ganges to western India (5th century): the Chalukyas ruled over the Deccan and were the hereditary enemies of the Pallavas of the south (5th-8th centuries), being finally defeated by the Rashtrakutas who held very much the same country. Henceforward the history of northern and southern India is not so closely knit together, the appearance of the Muhammadan being the chief disturbing factor . . .

With these general observations set down, it is possible to suggest some sort of chronological classification of Indian sculpture. The sculpture of the Mauryan period stands apart from the work of the

succeeding periods, being distinguished by the whole conception and feeling of the work, and technically by its brilliant polish. It seems impossible to discuss it apart from questions of foreign influence. The work at Bharhut and Sanchi is distinguished by its low relief cutting and its boldly placed design. Furthermore, the Buddha figure is not to be found at either site and they share a rather restricted series of common symbols and motives. The Mathura sculpture of the Kushan period departs from this ancient tradition by its portrayal of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and the Tirthankaras of the Jain sect. Large figures were made at Mathura, cut in high relief, in fact almost in the round. These were intended as icons, or what came to be known as *Dhruva-Bera* in mediæval times, and were a new departure. Kushan sculpture, also, shows some signs of having been influenced by the foreign Græco-Buddhist art of Gandhara in the far north-west.

For this reason and because of the geographical gap between the sites, it is better to treat the contemporary Amaravati sculptures separately. Two styles are discernible at Amaravati, covering a period of perhaps two centuries. In certain of the earlier sculptures the Buddha figure is not found and even in the later works the ancient symbolism is freely used. Boldly cut figures on a large scale were also made at Amaravati. The work there, however, is distinguished by its development of the treatment of the pillar-medallion and by its exquisite rendering of foliage and flower scrolls. In both cases the cutting is in very low relief and extremely accurately done, bringing into the work an entirely new quality that may be referred to as "draughtsmanship." The circular medallion is no longer an imposed limitation, but is the basis of the unfolding of the whole design. This naturally led to the abandonment of the old peripatetic, graphic style, in which the characters were repeated again and again in the same relief until the story had been made clear in all its incidents. At Amaravati whole medallions are devoted to single scenes, such as the great Translation of the Begging bowl, and series of scenes are portrayed preferably on long panels, subdivided architecturally by the walls and gateways of the setting. The movement of the time was towards sophistication and that iconographical conciseness which lies at the heart of the work of the later periods.

It is in the rendering of flower and foliage that Amaravati excels. Here the tendency is a refining one, bringing about a delicacy and subtlety of treatment that borders on the fanciful. The lovingly exact reproduction of *lotus*, jack-fruit and *bigonia* at Bharhut and Sanchi is still present but is continually exceeded, so that petal and leaf are now subordinate to sheer delight in design. The lotuses that fill the spandrels of the pillar-medallions are caught in eddies of broken water that in its turn is transmuted and breaks into foliage. In this sense Amaravati lives throughout the subsequent periods of Indian sculpture. The deliciously low relief of the Mukandwara *mandapa*, the foliage bands of the doorways of the 5th century shrines and the many fruit and foliage panels among the Ajanta frescoes could not have been but for Amaravati, and are explained by it. If its dynamic vitality of design is the excellence of Indian mediaeval sculpture, it is derived from Amaravati.

Yet in more ways than one, Amaravati is rather the end-point of the older period than the beginning of the new. Its iconography and setting link it with what has gone before: Buddhism brought it into being. The art of mediaeval India is Brahmanical in essence and is founded upon a rock-cutting technique worked out at Ajanta, Badami and Ellora. It is true that from the beginning large caves had been cut but they are not comparable with the mediaeval caves. These are not mere imitations of wooden buildings, empty facades. The final touches of their lavish decoration appear as the necessary end of the first strokes of the mallet that laid the plan and fixed the proportions. Not only does sculpture exist here, but it exists as an integral part defining pillar-forms, plinths, mouldings and doors, so that no line can be drawn between the architectural and the decorative.

It has been said that the architecture and sculpture of the cave-temples and structural temples are closely related, and that the plan of the Ajanta chapels is derived directly from that of the little 5th century shrines. Post-Kushan (2nd century A.D.) Indian sculpture is best discussed from the point of view of two co-existent styles of work, the grand style of the large-scale cult images and the small-scale work in low-relief. This is especially true of 5th century sculpture. When speaking of "Gupta" sculpture reference is usually made to the large-scale figures, cut almost in

the round, and the bas-relief work is left undiscussed. Yet the work of the future derives rather from the lesser style than from the greater. The door-mouldings of the Chandragupta Cave at Udayagiri are typical of this lesser style and provide a fixed point for the chronology of the century, since the cave is dated 401 A.D. The well-known architrave and pillar-jambs from Garwha are perhaps its finest examples: they are among the most beautiful of Indian sculptures. In the larger sculptures, the recognised poses, sitting or standing with their proper gestures (*mudra*) are already determined. The cutting of the drapery, too, is formalised after the tradition that came into being at Mathura. It is only in the treatment of features and hands that the new influences are clearly visible in a sense of movement, or rather, of momentary poise. This greater Gupta art is often called "classical," in so much as refinement and clear definition are its outstanding qualities. The epithet may be accepted in this limited sense, but the use of the word cannot be allowed to suggest that there is any breach between Gupta sculpture and the work of the succeeding centuries. The same motives persist in the same context and, moreover, the development thenceforward through Ajanta and Badami, and the whole range of the Ellora caves, is complete without a break.

This period has been described as one of florescence, in literature, as well as sculpture and painting. The two traditions are closely interwoven, for the motives and sentiments of early mediaeval sculpture are confessedly literary. It must, however, be pointed out that the secondary literature dealing with architecture and sculpture, which arose at the end of the period, is strictly limited to the time that gave it birth. The *Sastras* are doubtless a late summary of what may be called the mediaeval tradition, but in detail with regard to the iconography and technical analysis of mouldings and pillars, they cannot be applied to the earlier work. They are concerned, not with the period of the great cave-temples but with the 10th and 11th centuries, the period of the great structural temples

Such a survey suggests a division of the history of Indian sculpture and architecture into seven periods:

- (1) The Mauryan Period (3rd century B.C.).

- (2) The Early Period, of which the types are: (a) Bharhut (2nd century B.C.), (b) Sanchi (late 1st century B.C.).
- (3) The Kushan Period (2nd century A.D.).
- (4) Amaravati (2nd and 3rd century A.D.).
- (5) The Gupta Period (5th century A.D.).
- (6) The Early Mediaeval Period (cave-temples, 6th to 8th century).
- (7) The Late Mediaeval Period (structural temples, 8th to 13th centuries).

Here reference is made to specific types of work (Sanchi, Amaravati, the cave-temples) rather than to epochs. Dynastic titles are avoided except in three cases. Of these the Mauryan Period is quite distinct and entirely acceptable. The Gupta Period, however, has suffered from misuse: geographically it has been racked to include such sites at Badami and Aihole which were certainly never under Gupta rule and should be called Chalukyan if anything: chronologically it was extended by Vincent Smith to include Ellora and Elephanta. Here it is defined by the new departure of the great cave-temples. The Kushan Period is an unfortunate necessity, for the sculptures are dated in the Kushan era which remains somewhat debatable.

Furthermore, it seems permissible to treat of these periods in two groups, as belonging to *Ancient India* and *Mediaeval India*. The first contains the Buddhist and Jain stupas of Barhut, Sanchi, Mathura and Amaravati, the second the rise and development of the Brahmanical temple. It is not, however, suggested that the Ancient Periods are specifically non-Brahmanical. They set forth the rise and development of a native art, realistic in vision and popular by conception. Its godlings and nymphs are drawn from the tradition of the very soil, older than Brahman or Buddha. The scenes it chose to portray are taken from the *Jatakas*, popular tales on everybody's lips. The Mediaeval Periods represent the crystallisation, out of all this wealth of the past, of a tradition that is definitely literary, if not entirely hieratic. The sculpture of the Early Period was brought into being to adorn relic-mounds in the open air with full play of changing light and shadow. The sculpture of the Mediaeval Period was brought into being as the necessary correlative of cave-temple architecture, in a half light that is changeless within colonnades of pillars of rock-cut proportions. Under these conditions it was deprived of the cheap drama of *chiaroscuro* and

therefore never abandoned the true bas-relief frontality. Set against the imponderable mass of the living rock it never loses its well-founded poise. However rapid the movement or extravagant the design, the limitations are never exceeded. It is never merely *Baroque*, but is, on the contrary, full of calculated restraint and contrasts. In the *Das Atatara* Cave (No 15) at Ellora the colossal reliefs are set off by absolutely plain, square pilasters. on the *Kailasa*, the same plain pilasters lead up to the extravagant arch (*makara-torana*) which encloses the icon. The cutting, also, is full of subtlety. it is never angular, just as the design is never melodramatically linear. Its most striking characteristic is its rigid adherence to the true necessities of bas-relief. The depth of the cutting is done with great skill and daring. sometimes whole parts are cut in the round. But there is never any attempt to force the sculpture out of the mother-rock, just as there is never any attempt to disguise the nature of the rock itself. . . It is easy for a stranger to over-emphasise the part played by iconography in such an art, but it is in fact an essentially abstract art, in no sense representational. After all, these many manifestations are One and the same. . .

The mediaeval structural temples of Northern India consist of a shrine (*Vimana*) crowned by a spire (*Sikhara*). In its simple form the shrine is square and has four faces or rather panels for icons (*Bhadra*). Between these four faces, however, one or more recessed angles may be symmetrically introduced and it is upon this principle that the complicated star-shaped plans of the Hoysala temples are arrived at. In front of the shrine there are usually one or more pavilions (*mandapa*) which are put to various uses. Just as there are many forms of plan, so are there modified forms of spires. In the simplest form of square shrine a miniature spire (*sringa* or turret) is applied over each *bhadra*, the whole being crowned and bonded together by the weight of a corrugated circular member of solid stone called *amalaka*. The parts of the supporting columns of the *mandapas* are technically analysed in the same way as the mouldings of the shrine. There are many varying types of pillars, among which are pillars with square bases and octagonal shafts and others with pot-and foliage capitals, derived directly from the cave-temples. The whole temple stands upon a solid basement (*pitha*) which forms

the floor of the interior. This is carved with a series of horizontal mouldings which always follow the same order, though parts are often omitted. Among the most usual mouldings are rows of grinning faces called *kirttimukhas*, and processions of horses, elephants or men, besides some form of semi-circular cushion moulding, ornamented with jewel motives or geometrical diamond reliefs. Above the base rises the wall of the shrine (*mandovara*) upon which are sculptured bands of male and female figures, *chauri*-bearers and *apsarasas*, attendant, as it were, upon the gods sculptured on the *bhaddras*. These friezes are divided horizontally by bands of flying figures or *kirttimukhas*, and vertically by the bounds of the rectangular panels upon which they are carved. String courses and vertical panels of flatly cut foliage motives are also introduced and the icon-niches on the *bhaddras* are set between plain, ringed pilasters. These icons follow the established canons but with regard to the attendant figures and mythical beasts an infinite variety of poses is evident. The theoretical iconography by no means exhausts the rich variety of treatment of the existing sculptures, especially of the erotic and dancing subjects.

As in all arts, certain modes occur again and again. The upright pose (*samabhangā*) is usually reserved for figures of the gods, while the female figure is cut in a flexed position (*dvibhangā* or *tribhangā*), the pose in which the figure of Hermes stands on the British Museum pier from the temple of Aphrodite at Ephesus. These technical distinctions do no more than indicate the type of figure. The actual sculpture, although the idiom is rigid, is done with absolute freedom. Such a thing is difficult to comprehend out of India. But the individualistic definition of the artistic function is of modern origin, as is the idea of a "work of art." We do not know the names of these Indian sculptors and indeed they had no individual existence outside their professional confraternity. That the guild organisation of ancient India was widespread and radical is well known, and it is only in terms of guild work that Indian art can be understood

Indian thought does not isolate objects by æsthetic analysis or any other analytical process. The associations of a piece of sculpture or of a whole temple, and the associations of the person brought into contact with it both contribute to the state of mind from which

the sense of values is derived. Among the associations of a piece of sculpture or a temple which, so to speak, wait upon the mind, its subject or dedication and its repute as a place of sanctity, its legends of miracles, and the thousands of pieces of money that are said to have been paid to bring it into being, all have import. It follows that devotion can derive value from any chance stone or red daubed rock. This confusion between the religious and the aesthetic, so evident to the analytic mind, is not a matter of failure to arrive at distinctions but of a definite refusal to admit of distinctions in the sum of reactions that is human life, in which qualities are held to exist only as stupid preferences and intensity is alone satisfying.

Misuse of the stock terms of art-criticism has reduced many of them to the verge of meaninglessness. Continual special application of a term must have this effect, especially when the subject to which it is applied is as wide and as little known as the history of art. In this way "Classical" has long since required redefinition whenever it is used, and in the toils of German anthropological aesthetics "Gothic" is likely to be reduced to the same state. It is the thesis of Wilhelm Worringer that art may be treated of as being of three kinds, Primitive, Classical and Oriental, or rather since he is a psychologist, he prefers to create a Primitive Man, a Classical Man and an Oriental Man, putting all three terms to very special use. The art of Primitive Man is an art of absolute values deliberately avoiding the arbitrariness of life of which it is said that he is afraid. Primitive Man was only "artistically active when he drew or scratched on the plane surface." When he modelled in clay "it was merely a bubbling over of playful imitative impulse." Classical Man moulds his cosmos out of chaos: his "life becomes more beautiful, more joyful, but it loses in depth, in grandeur, and in force." Oriental Man is the close of the cycle of development: "he is no longer confused and tormented by dualism, but feels it as an exalted destiny and humbles himself." The art of Oriental Man "exhibits an absolute redemptive character, and its sharply outlined, transcendently abstract complexion divides it from all that is Classical. It expresses no joyful affirmation of sensuous vitality, but belongs rather entirely to the other domain which through all the transitoriness and chances of life strives for a higher world,

freed from all illusions of the senses, from all false impressions, a domain in which inevitableness and permanency reign and to which the great serenity of Oriental instinctive knowledge gives its consecration" These types are admitted to be heuristic, but the admission is hardly legitimate, for criticism is an end in itself. The evil of calling up such ghosts is that they are apt to prove uncontrollable and linger on when they are no longer wanted. It is also obvious that all such psychological theory is some degrees distant from the object discussed, works of art of widely distributed areas and times, of which an intimate and exhaustive knowledge is assumed. Again, when Worringer postulates his Artistic Man and centres his activity in the Will to create, a whole host of ghosts arise each answering to the call of Worringer's special context. For this "Will to create" is by no means free, but formed like any material event out of its general environment. His cycle of Primitive, Classical and Oriental is distinctly evolutionary, but with that 20th century German kink to it that finds something soothingly rhythmical in reversible equations that end where they began.

Worringer's Gothic is the product of the interweaving of scholasticism and mysticism, racially determined. Very much the same interpretation has been given to mediaeval Indian sculpture. The setting is admittedly comparable. There is an interfusion of monastic life and guild life. There is scholasticism and mysticism. The culture of the period is, also, widely spread, yet closely linked by constant coming and going. Furthermore, Worringer's German argument concerning Gothic is closely paralleled by various Indian nationalist arguments concerning Indian Art. Both come as a kind of belated pre-Raphaelitism, cumbered with much sentiment.

In the face of this complexity, it is better to return to the stones themselves. Mediaeval Indian sculpture has actually almost nothing in common with Gothic sculpture. Indian architecture finds existence only through the existence of Indian sculpture. Indian sculpture is not individual in the sense that Gothic sculpture is. Its forms and motives belong without reservation to the period and to the whole of India at that period. On the other hand Indian sculpture is not Classical in the strictest sense of the word, although its clarity of purpose and method is worthy of the title "Classical" in the lesser sense. In the cave-temples complex traditional pillar-

forms are reduced to severe simplicity, just as in the structural temples the rich traditional treatment of foliage derived from Amaravati, is abandoned for a flat fretted delineation severely set in square panels. Similarly, Indian pillar forms are essentially weight bearing forms—no attempt is made to lead the eye upwards. Furthermore, conciseness of presentation and the acceptance of severe limitations are not the only characteristics of Indian sculpture. Its beautiful treatment of jewellery typifies the richness of feeling that lies at its heart. The word "richness" applied to sculpture, perhaps suggests a certain degree of unfitness, a superabundance of the merely decorative. In India figure sculpture has developed apart from the purely decorative work of the stock motives—the one is the foil to the other and is used as such with a fine sense of contrast. The "richness" of the figure sculpture is by no means a decorative richness—so far from being lavish, it is entirely subtle. To the unaccustomed eye these sculptures repeat themselves in pose and in treatment. This art has been called hieratic, mechanical, dead. Certainly it is within the rigid bounds of the details of a fixed iconography that expression is sought for. In spite of the iconographical purpose, what is expressed here is not a matter of similitude of any kind. The richness of Indian sculpture lies wholly in the work. Even in its erotic passages it is the least suggestive art in the world.

Groce has taught that art is experience, just as the knowledge of history is experience—or nothing. It is, therefore, advisable if not absolutely necessary, not merely to look at objects of art, but to know their history. This argument would suggest that a piece of sculpture, Indian or Florentine, could not be appreciated except through the imaginary foreground of its provenance, actual and mental as far as it can be reconstructed. This approaches the Indian definition of appreciation which only concerns itself with the gross reaction. But such a suggestion confuses rather than clarifies, for it fails to distinguish between a piece of sculpture and any item of a culture, such as a pottery bowl, a surgical instrument or a set of dice. From the point of view of historical reconstruction all objects have the same value, but this value cannot be equated with æsthetic value, but is of a kind with the value of the missing part of a puzzle. The completed reconstruction, which is admittedly the

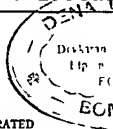
product of an imaginative exercise, may lead to a general sense of understanding and sympathy. But it cannot effect the ultimate question of æsthetic value. A knowledge of the abstruse subject of Indian iconography does not contribute materially towards the appreciation of Indian sculpture. A knowledge of its technical development does.

Where, then, in this sculpture does one find evidence of Worringer's *Oriental Man*? Is Indian art "transcendentally" abstract? Is it "sharply outlined"? What is the spirit that inspires it if not a "joyful affirmation" of form? Is not all sculpture a "joyful affirmation" of form?

The facts may be shortly summarised. Indian sculpture is essentially bas-relief sculpture. At Bharhut, Sanchi and Mathura, the uprights between the gateway architraves are usually carved on each side with little figures in bas-relief, not with one figure in the round (Plate 1). Sometimes, indeed, such figures are carved in the round all except the head, which is duplicated in full face on each side to avoid the half face silhouette, a trick which is preserved in the wooden brackets of 18th century Southern Indian temple-cars. Mediaeval Indian sculpture was created at the great cave temple sites and its technique and its sense of values are derived directly from the cave-temples. Preserving its rock-cut bas-relief nature, it is scrupulously faithful to its material. At Ellora there are local as well as contemporary styles, varying according to the changing nature of the rock, while late mediaeval work in sandstone and marble from the same site and of the same period often differs considerably. The form arrived at is curiously independent of *chiaroscuro*. In the brilliant Indian sunlight *chiaroscuro* has nothing subtle about it and its black and white crudities consequently are rejected. In the same way the line of the silhouette is not stressed and modelling, in the sense of reproduction of the planes of muscle and limb, is rejected almost entirely. Here perhaps is the unique quality of Indian sculpture. The broadly conceived planes of such a figure as the Ilyssos, especially the powerful flat treatment of the thighs, is the antithesis of the treatment of mass in Indian sculpture, just as the bulgy articulation of the musculature of most Italian sculpture is the antithesis of its insistence on simplification. Since the nature of the matrix is never disguised, the form imposed upon

it is always well founded. These figures, however extravagant the posture may be, always stand. The design springs from below like a growing thing. The treatment of limbs is curvilinear but austere so, the straight lines of the lower part of the body and of the arms being used to develop the swelling hips and breasts. Arms and hands are very vividly treated, the drawing of the gesture, however perfect, never degenerating into a dominant silhouette. The sense of movement is never linear in origin but always in three dimensions.

It is obvious that such an art is based upon a special sense of form. It has been said that form and material are very closely linked in Indian sculpture. It is equally true that the sculptor is never wholly occupied with superficial form. As has been said, the finished work is always well founded, like the rock itself which contained it in all its parts before the chisel touched it. It might be fancied that an art based upon the manipulation of superficial form is comparable with a philosophy based upon the manipulation of syllogistic logic. It is in a sense, linear, full of sequent points. An art that adheres as closely to material as Indian sculpture does, is not linear in any sense but truly massive. There is, perhaps, some parallel to this in Indian thought which in the main is not concerned with argument, but is almost entirely occupied with a few basic conceptions, among which the realisation of impermanence is dominant. Such parallels, however, are only of didactic value. A work of art is not composed of generalities. It is nothing if not the special problem of the interested mind. Criticism is, of course, based upon interest, but in a secondary, more or less remote, unproductive sense. The essential thing is the interest of the creative artist in his problem, and this seems to have a fair claim to be considered as universal though subject to conditions. The ethnological and psychological problems lie in the conditions, but the work of art is its own problem.



A NOTE UPON THE SCULPTURES ILLUSTRATED

These sculptures fall into four main groups. The frontispiece represents a torso from Sanchi. Plate 1 illustrates a typical example of Kushan sculpture in red sandstone from Mathura. Plates 2 to 5 illustrate sculptures from ruined structural shrines of approximately the 5th century A.D. (Gupta). It is possible that this group came from Garwha.

Plates 6 to 22 illustrate mediaeval sculptures chiefly of the 10th century A.D. Those on Plates 6 and 7 are of granulite and come from Western India, probably from the Bombay Presidency. The remaining plates have been described as coming from Rajputana, using the word in its widest sense, as stretching from Allahabad to Ahmadabad. In this area three building materials other than brick are used—marble, limestone and a large range of sandstones, varying in colour from deep red to grey. Limestone is comparatively rare. The dating of these works is based upon two main landmarks, the temples of Vimala Sha (1031 A.D.) and of Tejahpala (1230 A.D.) at Mount Abu. Other fixed points are the Nilakantha temple at Udayapur (circa 1070 A.D.) and the Sas-Bahu temple at Gwalior (late 11th century A.D.). The well-known Khajuraho temples mostly date from the end of the 10th century. It is probable that most of these sculptures come from sites in Gwalior State.

It is usually taken for granted that the coming of Islam put an immediate end to the development of Indian architecture. But this is not so: it was not until the end of the 13th century that the end came, at the hands of Ulugh Khan, brother and viceroy of Ala-ud-din Khilji.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES

✱

EARLY SCULPTURE

Frontispiece Female torso Sandstone Probably from the West Gateway, Stupa I, Sanchi Late 1st century B.C. Height 2 ft 4 in

The figure wears a beaded necklace and five-strand belt, the invisible waist-cloth being supported by a flat band tied on the left hip. The hair is worn in two heavy plaits, over which three rich garlands hang down the back. These were not hung from the neck but from the forehead, being bound by a broad ribbon. This diaphanous treatment of drapery was not universal at Sanchi. The British Museum bracket-figure, also probably from the West Gateway, shows the waist-cloth clearly portrayed. This figure was one of a pair forming brackets to the lowest architrave of the gateway. On the North and South Gateways, which are usually said to be a little earlier, these figures are enclosed by the curved trunks of the trees which support them. On the East and West Gateways they swing boldly free. It is pointed out that Indian sculpture is essentially bas-relief work. The mastery of these early bracket-figures in the round is startling, and compared with Bharhut and Mathura, unique. As with the treatment of decorative motives at Amaravati, they forecast the work of the future. To those who see little in Indian art but evidences of foreign influence, a comparison between this figure and the torso, also from Sanchi but of the late 5th century A.D., now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, would not come amiss. The vision and appreciation are identical. No art has had a more consecutive development.

KUSHAN SCULPTURE

Plate I a and b Upright from the architrave of a *Stupa* gateway
Red sandstone Mathura, United Provinces Kushan 2nd century A.D. Height 19 in

On one side is a female figure turned with a garland offering in her raised hands—on the other side is a second figure with her right hand on her hip and a sword in her left. They both wear the heavy anklets, earrings and beaded belt of the ancient period, and the flowing Kushan waist-cloth.

GUPTA SCULPTURE

Plate 2. Female figure. Sandstone. Rajputana. 5th century A.D. (Gupta). Height 2 ft. 1 in.

The rhythm of this common Indian pose is beautifully emphasised in this sculpture. The details of hair and scarf and the suavity of the relief cutting identify it as Gupta, though it is difficult to discuss these sculptures from early temples because so few of them have survived. Most of them are fragments of door-panels.

Plate 3. (a) Standing figure. Sandstone. Rajputana. 5th century A.D. (Gupta). Height 14 in.

The figure wears the long waist-cloth, a scarf and jewelled necklace, pendant and anklets. The raised hand probably held a *chauri*.

(b) The river-goddess, *Yamuna*. Sandstone. Rajputana. 5th century (Gupta). Height 21 in.

These figures of river-goddesses invariably appear on the lintels of the doorways of the early shrines and caves, though it is plain that they are not always to be identified as *Ganga* and *Yamuna* unless they have their identifying vehicles, the mythical water-monster (*Makara*) and the tortoise. In the early Buddhist caves they appear to be regarded simply as tree- and river-goddesses guarding the threshold. Later they lose their identity amid a host of *Nagas* and *Chauri*-bearers and at Ellora all these lesser powers are reduced to utter insignificance by the colossal Bodhisattvas who stand on either side of the doorway.

Plate 4. Female figure. Sandstone. Rajputana. 5th century A.D. (Gupta). Height 12 in.

The figure stands in a familiar Indian pose, under a tree with her hand raised over her head. At her feet is a little dwarf.

Plate 5 (a) Female figure Sandstone Rajputana 5th century A D (Gupta) Height 16½ in

The figure is in a half-dancing, half-flying pose with the right arm raised behind the head

(b) Female figure Sandstone Rajputana Circa 6th century A D Height 21 in

The figure is represented as loosening the long waist cloth She wears anklets, armlets and a double breast chain

MEDIAEVAL SCULPTURE

Plate 6 *Devī* Granulite Western India Circa 900 A D Height 21 in

This is a four armed figure bearing the sword and trident in the upper hands The goddess wears the high plaited headdress ornamented with the digit of the moon, and many jewelled necklaces This image is not architectural but belongs to the class of images designed for worship (*Dhruva bera*)

Plate 7 Female figure Granulite Western India Circa 900 A D Height 2 ft 8 in

The figure carries a garland in the left hand the right hand probably held a *chauri*

Plate 8 *Śiva* and *Uma* Sandstone Rajputana Late 10th century A D Height 2 ft 7 in

This group is a well known and often repeated icon of the non-architectural kind The goddess is embraced by the god who is four armed and carries the trident and snake in his upper hands Below is the bull, *Śiva's* vehicle and the elephant headed *Ganēśa* On the throne back are rampant beasts and *Makara* supporters Above are flying garland bearers (see Plate 22 (b)), a motive that became customary at Mathura in the Kushan period /

Plate 9 *Vishnu* Sandstone Rajputana Late 10th century A D Height 3 ft 8 in

The god is four-armed and wears a jewelled belt with pendants and the long jewelled garland. On either side of the halo are miniature representations of the Boar and Man-Lion incarnations, while below are *Chauri*-bearers. The image belongs to the same class as that illustrated on Plate 8 and has the same supporters.

Plate 10. Female figure with *Chauri* and incense-burner. Limestone. Rajputana. Circa 1000 A.D. Height 3 ft.

The figure holds the *Chauri* in the right hand and the incense-burner in the left. The fall of the waist-cloth and the jewelled pendants of the belt are beautifully composed as part of the scrolled moulding against which the figure stands.

Plate 11. Female figure. Limestone. Rajputana. Circa 1000 A.D. Height 3 ft.

This figure belongs to the same frieze as the figure illustrated above on Plate 10.

Plate 12. Female figure. White marble. Rajputana. Circa 1000 A.D. Height 2 ft. 5 in.

The central figure feeds a parrot, the emblem of the God of Love, from her breast. To the left is a male standing figure, the whole being set against a plain ringed pilaster with brackets in the form of prancing monsters.

Plate 13. Female figure. Sandstone. Rajputana. Circa 1000 A.D. Height 2 ft. 8 in.

The figure is in the upright pose, the strict symmetry of which is used to display the rich treatment of the jewellery.

Plate 14. (a and b). Female figures. Sandstone. Rajputana. Circa 1000 A.D. Height 20 in. and 2 ft. 3 in.

These figures serve admirably to show the freedom of treatment won by the sculptor in his acceptance of convention. The jewellery of figure A is especially fine. Figure B shows to perfection the column-like building up of the lower part of the body, leading up to the soft plasticity of the loins and the heavy breasts. The sense of poise is absolute.

NOTE

The frontispiece and the following plates are taken from the original pieces in the possession of Mr. Edward Goldston.



Plate 1a



Plate 1b



Plate 2



Plate 3a



Plate 3b



Plate 4



Plate 5a



Plate 5b



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate II

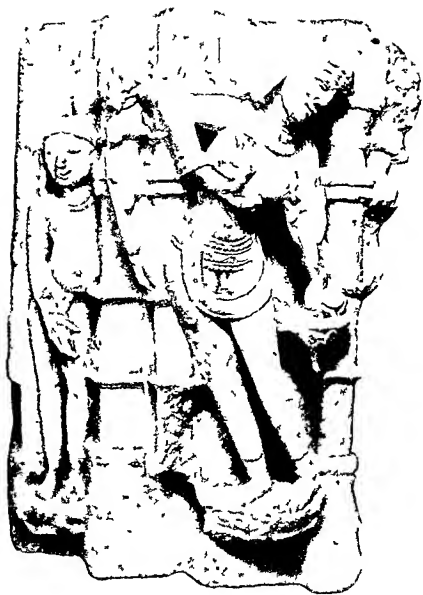


Plate 12



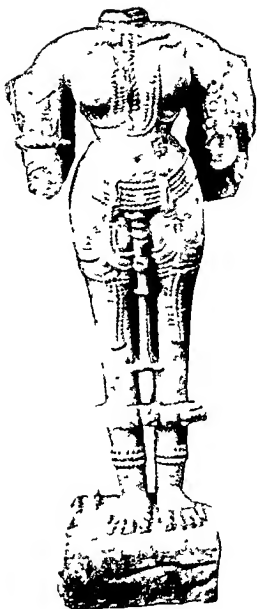


Plate 13

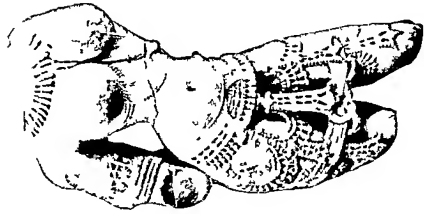


Plate 14a

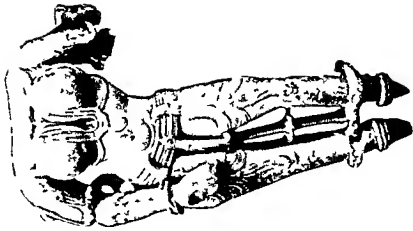


Plate 14b



Plate 15a



Plate 15b



Plate 16

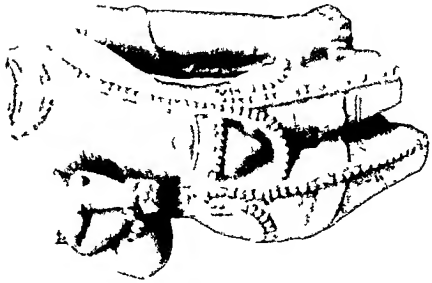


Plate 17a



Plate 17b

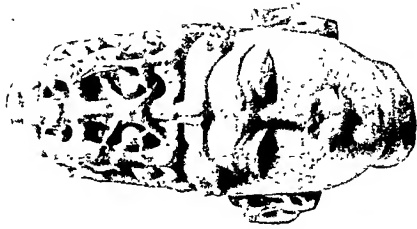


Plate 18a



Plate 18b

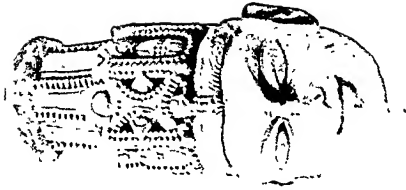


Plate 18c



Plate 19

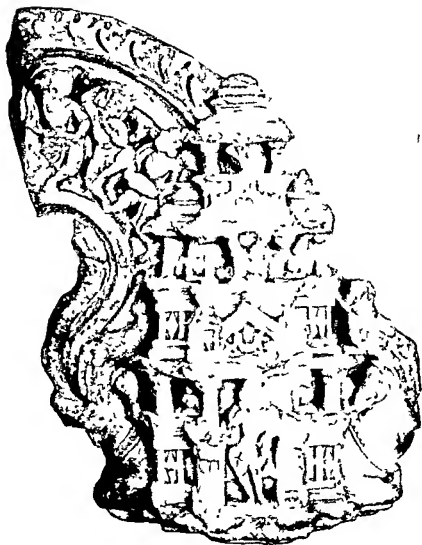


Plate 20

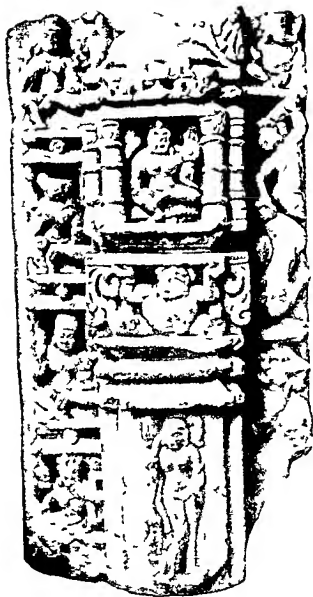


Plate 21



Plate 22a



Plate 22b



Plate 23

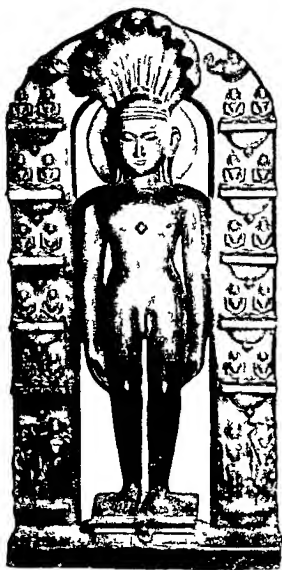


Plate 24